



A Brief Analysis of the Performativity and Non-performativity of Drama Education in Primary and Secondary Schools Based on the Current Aesthetic Education in Mainland China

Yutian Shi(✉)

The Central Academy of Drama, 39 Dongmianhua Hutong, Dongcheng District, Beijing, China
1464628104@qq.com

Abstract. As aesthetic education is attached increasing importance to in mainland China, different aesthetic courses have been established in a growing number of primary and secondary schools. Drama, as a class of foreign origin, is confronted with the following problems: a lack of teaching strength, a lack of teaching systems suitable for local students, and deficiency in the depth and accuracy of the recognition of this class. Education scholars' study of the drama class is limited to superficial theory and analyses of the teaching experience of others regions. There has been a lack of in-depth research and practical meaning. The paper uses documentation method, interviewing method and combines the author's own experience, to put forward some suggestions and viewpoints of the author on the drama class of primary and secondary schools in mainland China, thus providing reference to the implementation of future courses.

Keywords: drama education · primary and secondary schools · education · independent thinking

1 Introduction

With the publication of Advice on Reinforcing and Improving Aesthetic Education in the New Era (hereinafter referred to as Advice), more and more teachers and educators have realized the importance of aesthetic education. The Advice points out that, while teaching, the teacher must attach equal importance to the five categories of education and cultivate socialist constructors and successors who have developed equally in morality, intellect, sports, aesthetics and labor. However, the latest findings suggest that aesthetic education is still a weak area in education. By reading relevant literature, the author discovered that most researchers focus their attention on the implementation of aesthetic courses and the setup of contents. But as a matter of fact, our government is rather late in publishing policies on aesthetic education, so for now, most we are referring to foreign experiences, and have not formed an aesthetic course system that is suitable for native

students. Meanwhile, some scholars trace the sources, and explain the “comprehensive educational function” of aesthetic education from the perspective aesthetics, thus emphasizing the necessity of aesthetic courses and providing rich theories for aesthetic education. However, not many has put forward a feasible plan as regards the teaching assessment of aesthetic courses. But only when a mature teaching assessment system has been formed, will the course objectives be set, thus perfecting the different stages of aesthetic teaching. The paper combines the Advice, starts from the performativity and non-performativity of drama classes in primary and secondary schools, integrates the author’s past internship experience and the research findings of the predecessors, thus building a drama course system suitable to Chinese students.

2 Research Design

This study used qualitative method. First, semi-structured interview was the most important data collection approach in this study. According to the enormous number of studies that have employed this approach, the semi-structured interview has been found to be the most productive strategy for obtaining data for a case study. Two participants working as drama teachers were invited to two rounds of interviews, with each session lasting around thirty minutes in length. During the first-round interview, participants’ general information, as well as their impressions of drama education, will be gathered. The general information provided by the participants includes, among other things, their educational history, employment experience, work environment, class composition, and contact with relevant persons (e.g., parents, colleagues, and leaders). The goal of the second series of interviews is to get a better understanding of the impact factors that will influence how to integrate the aesthetic education into the drama education. In most cases, second-round interviews will run between 60 and 80 min in total duration. The second approach was the documents. The collection of relevant documents is an additional complementary method of data collection. Because relevant documents are typically created in their natural state, they have a higher level of authenticity and trustworthiness than other methods such as interviews and observations because they are created in their natural state. Fresh ideas, parallels, imaginative leaps, and linkages may be generated by documents, so broadening the researcher’s perspective and introducing new analytical approaches to the research process. As a general rule of thumb, documents pertaining to a case can be divided into three categories: (1) public documents, such as school policy documentation; (2) individual documents, such as teachers’ personal instructional plans; and (3) material materials, such as video recordings of the lessons.

Purposive sampling will be used to choose participants for this research, and they will be informed of their participation. Purposive sampling is the most successful approach of collecting data since it gives the researcher with a more complete picture of the topic than any other method. Our sample included two drama teachers recruited from mainland China. Before the data collection, both of the two participants were invited to fill in the consent form including the research goal, content, methods, as well as the application of the data.

3 Results

3.1 Course Objectives

The Advice points out that: beauty plays a key role in purifying morality and enriching the spirit. Aesthetic education is education of the aesthetics, education of the moral sentiments, and education of the soul. It is education that inspires imagination and facilitates innovation. It can improve aesthetic qualities, nurture the mind, pacify the soul, stimulate innovation, and renew vigor. The teaching objective of drama education, a specific subfield of aesthetic education, is to lead the students to take part in the classroom activities in different ways; help them improve in creativity, imagination, communication skills, and independent thinking, so as to make them develop comprehensively. Course Plan and Criteria for Compulsory Education 2022 points out that the art courses in primary and secondary schools must attach importance to the perception, discovery and experience of beauty; enrich imagination and encourage innovation; improve the students' ability to express art; perceive and understand the cultural connotation and outstanding traditional culture in different regions and among different ethnic groups of China.

As regards the current situation of aesthetic and drama education in mainland China, one of the interviewees of the interview, Mr. Liang, puts forward his own insights: "Because of the Double Reduction Policy, many aesthetic courses are put online in a haste. A comprehensive course system has not yet been established. Take the drama course as an example. In the drama course, the teacher teaches many students within 45 min. Meanwhile, most schools are target-driven, and require teachers to mobilize the students to rehearse the play and present it in group activities. So, during this process, the students can only experience how it feels to recite the lines and play the roles, not many of them will create works of their own."

Therefore, the drama course of the primary and secondary schools in mainland China has the following features. First, students do not have the chance to take part in the course equally. The teacher failed to pay equal attention to each student, hence he can't teach them in accordance with their aptitude. Second, a correct and systematic teaching system is not established, the school leaders' recognition of the drama course is limited to the performativity, namely play rehearsal, they ignore the non-performative function, such as expression ability, imagination, cooperation, etc. Therefore, drama course is not popularized in mainland China.

3.2 The Contents of Drama Course in Primary and Secondary Schools

We often divide the drama course into three segments: gymnastics, drama games, drama rehearsal. But at the same time, teachers can plan their teaching contents with flexibility. The gymnastics first warms up the body, helps students change their way of thinking and adapt to the rhythm of drama class; second it improves the physical coordination of the body, and the students' ability to recognize and dominate different parts of the body. Drama game can increase students' cooperative ability, awareness of group, sense of group honor and the ability to perform certain rules. The rehearsal of the drama is the key of the drama course and is the most useful part in developing students' comprehensive

abilities. It can improve their ability to think independently, express fluently, as well as the ability to take action, imagine, and help each other. Also, it develops students' artistic taste and expands their knowledge.

In fact, what is described above is what happens under the ideal circumstances. It is different from the real situation of drama teaching in mainland China. Another interviewee of the interview, Mrs. Song, says: "in mainland China, a class takes 45 min. It takes 10 min to bring the students from the classroom to the drama room and maintain class order. It takes 15–20 min to engage in the "drama performance". And it takes 15–20 min to engage in the gymnastics and drama game." Just like Mr. Liang says previously, at the moment, in public schools in mainland China, the time of each class is fixed, but 45 min is very short for a drama class. Meanwhile, in the beginning of the term, the school leaders have settled the teaching tasks of the term and the performance at the end of the term. Their understanding of drama education is incorrect. They only focus on the performance results and ignore the students' growth during this process. Therefore, the target for running drama course is not achieved, because drama education should exert a positive influence on students in silence, in ways that are not visible.

3.3 Course Practice

Mr. Liang said in the interview that: "personally, I attach more importance to teaching students the methods to create and express, because although the students' imagination and creation are not mature, they are the results of their own creation. They will enjoy the creation process and the performance process and have a sense of achievement after performing their own creation. The students then will put forward questions and have the impulse to create on their own initiative. Therefore, the things they express will be even more imaginative, and will create again with what they've learned." Drama class is different from cultural classes, it attaches more importance to students' change in the learning process, rather than their achieving a certain score. Therefore, drama teachers should prioritize students' growth during the teaching process. Based on the publication of *Advice*, teachers should attach importance to the following abilities while teaching.

First, independent thinking. Students have to tackle problems on their own, when they encounter a difficulty during the script writing process or cannot understand the problems the characters face in the story. Teachers can give students advice and guidance when they seek help from them, but they should never give them the answer directly.

Second, help each other. Drama is an art that calls for the cooperation of different groups. The members of each group are assigned different tasks, but their abilities are different, so they have to cooperate and help each other. When one of them have a difficulty, the others must think of a solution together, rather than stand by with indifference or evade responsibilities.

Third, express their minds. In Chinese education, students are often found to be shy. Under the pressure of the teachers and parents, their own ideas are always neglected, so they find they do not need to express their own ideas, or do not have the space to express their ideas. But during drama classes, students must learn to express their minds. For example, when they or other members of the group meet a difficulty, they must communicate. Or, when they try to express the ideas of the character in the drama, they have to learn the ability to express.

Four, the ability to imagine. The imagination in drama classes is divided into two categories. The first is the wild imagination of the students. The other is the imagination about the characters in the drama. In fact, students in mainland China have an 100% trust in the standard answer, so they no longer attempt to pursue multiple answers to the same problem. But in drama classes, there is no absolute right or wrong. As regards the latter, I prefer to call it empathy. Nowadays, most students are the only child of their family. They are spoiled by parents and are unavoidably selfish and tend to ignore the feelings of others. But when they begin to rehearse a show, they have to stand in other's shoes, speak for the roles, listen to other people's stories, and feel the feelings of the roles.

Fifth, artistic abilities. This ability is emphasized in Advice. It points out that students need to improve their ability to appreciate art through aesthetic education and learn one or two art skills. In appearance, it is utilitarian. Although aesthetic education emphasizes students' experience and growth, it is a truth widely acknowledged that students can only learn what beauty is after they actually learn classroom teaching on true beauty. Only by allowing them to feel high quality and high standard art works will they improve in humanitarian cultivation and aesthetic qualities, nurture the mind, pacify the soul, stimulate innovation, and renew vigor, as described in the Advice.

Sixth, expand knowledge. The knowledge here refers to both natural and science knowledge, as well as knowledge of humanity and art. In drama classes, teachers teach in an interdisciplinary manner with the help of drama. After rehearsal and creation, students will learn knowledge of different types, thus deepening their understanding of the world. But no matter what type of knowledge it is, it is best studied through the students' own understanding. This will help them achieve a sense of achievement and learn independently, rather than rely completely on the teacher.

Among the six core abilities, the first four abilities can be described as non-performative, namely, they do not rely on performing a certain play, but is the cultivation of students' mental abilities. While the fifth and the sixth ability belong to the category of performative ability, because the improvement of artistic qualities must be attained through their own performing or appreciating performance of others. Non-performative abilities are tolerant toward each other and promote each other, while performative abilities require the facilitation of non-performative abilities, and is reliant on non-performative abilities, but meanwhile, it is also independent. From the perspective of drama education, it is safe for us to say that performative abilities and non-performative abilities are developing hand in hand, but we should not say that they develop shoulder to shoulder, because in drama classes, we educate for the purpose of developing rounded humans, rather than cultivating drama artists.

3.4 Course Assessment

So far, no complete assessment system has been established in mainland China, in terms of art courses. Take drama education for example. The methods to assess a drama involve procedural evaluation and formative evaluation. According to the qualities and abilities that drama course attempts to develop, Mr. Liang thinks that the evaluation of drama classes should be done from the following aspects. First, the ability to create new ideas. Second, the ability to express the new ideas. Third, the ability to combine learned contents. Fourth, the ability to cooperate. Fifth, the artistic standard. The author agrees

with Mr. Liang. During the teaching process, the teacher must observe in a careful and detailed fashion and record his observation. He must be able to judge if a student has changed according to a line word he has said, or a movement he has made. To sum up, the school can design the evaluation dimensions according to their own conditions. They can select the dimensions to assess the students, but they should never give the final judgement without due consideration.

4 Discussion

Recently, the Department of Education has published *Course Plan and Criteria for Compulsory Education 2022*, in which they made a detailed plan for implementing drama courses. From grade one, students need to simulate performing, play drama games, create drama programs, and plan drama activities. This will significantly promote the formation of a more perfect drama teaching system.

In selecting teaching contents, teachers should not use drama course as a means to cultivate drama actors/actresses. The objective of drama education is not to equip each student with professional performance skills and the ability to perform a complete drama, pure recitation of the lines is not the way to pass the essence of aesthetic education and drama to students. It's more important that they cooperate, create and appreciate in class, or else drama course will lapse into another form of examination-oriented education.

As regards the implementation of the drama course, the author suggests that teachers teach drama in primary and secondary schools in mainland China in three forms: creative drama, educational drama and education theatre.

Creative drama focuses on imagining the experience of real life. It aims at developing and improving life habits. Lower grade students can improve their life and study by taking creative drama course. From three to six grade in primary school, and from junior high school to senior high school, the teaching methods can transform from creative drama to education drama. In primary school, the course should remain interesting, but in secondary school, the teacher must conduct systematic planning. The teachers of different subjects record the difficulties and submit them to the drama teacher, who shall then create plays with the materials submitted by the teachers, so the students can learn in a relaxed and happy atmosphere, through role play, and this method will also enable the teacher to feel the importance and function of drama education. In addition, during the interview, Mrs. Song mentioned how to choose the places for drama classes. She said that: "I don't think it's wise to ask students to go to the activity room to attend drama class, because students of Hong Kong, Taiwan and Europe can adapt to the environment for activities, while mainland China students are different. They are accustomed to being bound by the chairs and desks, so if you suddenly bring them to the activity room, the class may become out of control, and even student injury may occur." What's more, drama clubs can be set in primary and secondary schools, so as to select students who are strongly interested in drama performance of work behind the scenes. Club activities can be a form of education theatre. For example, it can focus on hot issues in the school, and the members of the club can present the story in performance and encourage other students to take part in it, so as to solve the problem in the performing context collaboratively. Or play rehearsal can be conducted. But if club activities are carried out

in this way, the teacher must pay attention to their teaching methods. For example, when reading the script, students' understanding of the roles and feelings/emotions in the play, and the design of the costume and scenes, should be based on that of their own.

5 Conclusion

The *Course Plan and Criteria for Compulsory Education 2022* points out that course assessment should be done from three aspects: classroom assessment, assignment assessment, and end of term assessment. In the classroom, the teacher should be aware of the students' status real time, motivate them and help them solve their questions. Meanwhile, the design of assignments should be diversified and practical, and should be categorized into independent assignment, group assignment, written assignment, practice assignment, consolidating practice, innovative practice, common assignment and individual assignment. As regards the end of term assessment, the written exam should not be adopted, instead, performance should be used, and different assessing subjects can be invited, and the results should be presented in a grading system plus remarks.

Aesthetic education is still at the early stage of development in mainland China. There is great space of development, whether in terms of theoretical research or people's understanding. As regards drama education, importance must be attached to the benefits of non-performativity to student growth. Of course, the development of students' performative humanitarian and artistic qualities, put forward in the Advice, should not be neglected. The performativity and non-performativity should promote each other and develop together, while regarding the latter as the more important. Meanwhile, art education practitioners have to constantly consolidate relevant theoretical study and research, thus applying theory to practice, so as to form a sound, systematic aesthetic teaching and assessing system that suits students in mainland China.

References

1. Zhang, K., & Zhang, J. (2017). The enlightenment of foreign drama education model to China's school drama education. *Drama Literature*, 2017, 118–125.
2. Xu, J. (2020). Is educational drama a drama – Also on the non performing elements of educational drama. *Journal of Yunnan Arts University*, 03, 86–95.
3. Yi, Xiaoming. (2021). The construction of humanistic goals of contemporary Chinese Art Education. *Journal of Nanjing Normal University (Social Science Edition)*, 2021(01), 24–37.
4. Guo, S., & Liu, S. (2021). National aesthetic education evaluation policy: Background, content and principles. *Journal of Educational Science of Hunan Normal University*, 20(03), 14–21.
5. Wang, Desheng. (2020). Three difficulties and triple relations in school aesthetic education. *Journal of Northeast Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, 2020(03), 1–6.
6. Tang, X. (2016). Analysis on the practice of curriculum integration in primary and secondary schools in China. *Primary and Secondary School Management*, 2016(10), 8–11.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

